The Individual Development Plan (IDP)

"Learning is not compulsory but neither is survival." - W. Edwards Deming

"Nothing is more terrible than activity without insight." - Thomas Carlyle

Purpose

The annual performance evaluation provides an opportunity for the supervisor and the employee to look both backward and forward. The backward part is the evaluation itself, where the supervisor assesses how well the employee has met his or her performance expectations during the evaluation period. At this point, there is nothing the employee or supervisor can do to change that performance. It is history. But it also provides them with a baseline of what worked, what needs improvement, what needs additional attention, more resources, etc.

The baseline helps the supervisor and employee look forward to the next evaluation period. Expectations for the next period are spelled out in the next performance plan. But the assistance the employee will need to meet those expectations is laid out in the development plan.

Some positions and some circumstances may not require an in-depth development plan. Maybe just a few bullet statements indicate what the employee needs to focus on in the future and for what purpose (performance improvement, enhancement of current skills, anticipation of new skills to be required in the future, or self-enrichment). For these cases, the "Development Plans" box in Part 3 of the Individual Performance Evaluation will probably suffice.

When the situation calls for a more detailed plan, you may want to provide the employee with an Individual Development Plan (IDP). The Individual Development Plan (IDP) is an systematic approach to training and development designed to improve the employee's professional skills and the agency's productivity. This is a joint process, both in design and execution, in that the supervisor is more familiar with the agency's job requirements and future directions and the employee is more aware of specific, individual needs and aspirations. The main purpose is short-term (for the upcoming evaluation period) and aimed primarily at enhancing the agency's productivity through the employee's performance expectations. However, other components may be added, such as long-term goals (1-3 years after the upcoming evaluation period) aimed at the individual's career development or enrichment.

Designing the Individual Development Plan

The following process is a model. Use what works for your individual situation. Human resources are a major investment your organization uses to accomplish its mission. So taking whatever time and effort are necessary to design, implement, and monitor the IDP makes sense from the perspective of return on investment.

The process involves the following steps:

1. Prepare the Individual Performance Evaluation at the conclusion of the employee's evaluation period. The Individual Performance Evaluation includes the Individual Development Plan (IDP) as a segment of Part 3. The IDP can consist solely of what you include here, or it can be expanded to be a more detailed document using the format suggested below.

2. Consider each area of the employee's performance from the following perspectives and determine which should be developed in the upcoming evaluation period:
   - Strengths that, if enhanced, will contribute to the overall mission of the organization and increase productivity.
   - New skills that will be needed in the upcoming evaluation period.
   - Areas of performance/skills that need to be improved.

   The above constitute the Purpose of the development activity. Some additional needs that contribute to establishing the Purpose may include:

   - Mission need
   - Change in technology
   - New assignment
   - Future staffing need
   - Leadership development
   - Relationship building

3. Once the determinations in #2 have been made, list possible methods to facilitate this development: formal training, on-the-job training, self-development, mentoring or coaching, development activities/learning experiences, or other activities.

   Formal training – is any training conducted in a group setting. This may include academic college coursework, adult education, etc.

   Advantages:
   - It is presumed to be offered by credible, trained or otherwise informed sources.
   - It is presented in ongoing segments known in advance.
   - Typically, it is measurable through grades, accreditations, or pass/fail mechanisms.

   Disadvantages:
   - Potential cost.
   - Scheduling problems (it may take the employee away from other work activities or it may not be offered at the time needed).
   - At times, inability to control the curriculum and address specific learning objectives identified by the supervisor.

   On-the-job training – is a form of individualized training, usually structured, that takes place in the actual work setting while the employee performs regular job duties. The supervisor or a designated peer usually provides this type of training.

   Advantages:
   - It can be customized to the specific training need.
   - It can be provided on a timely basis.
   - It can be provided by the person(s) most likely to possess the appropriate skills.

Disadvantages:
- If the wrong person is chosen to provide the training, the ability of the person to present it skillfully significantly decreases.
- The seriousness given the training by the supervisor, the trainer, and the employee.

Self-development – is any form of training or development the employee initiates and obtains on his or her own. For instance, an employee who completed only a year of college before being hired into the current position may decide he or she wants to finish the college degree and takes classes on non-work time. The knowledge and skills the employee gains by going back to school may indirectly benefit job performance.

Advantages:
- The cost is borne by the employee on non-work time.
- Typically, because it is the employee's own time and money being invested, employees are highly motivated to do well.

Disadvantages:
- Lack of control over the type of development selected and the timing, because the individual employee determines when and what types of development opportunities to pursue. This is where joint design of the IDP is important; it provides you with the opportunity not only to help the employee consider career growth aspirations but also to map out how to get there. Supervisors are not precluded from discussing self-development options and how they might relate to both current and future job enhancement. You just can't require the employee to select this option unless it is offered on work time and at the expense of the organization.

Mentoring/coaching – is a less structured form of on-the-job training that extends beyond learning specific skills or processes. The purpose of mentoring or coaching is to provide the employee with ongoing feedback about progress in specific job requirements. This may occur through formal or informal discussions that allow the employee the opportunity to learn and refine her or his knowledge base by asking questions of the mentor/coach, through observation, or through completion of short tasks or assignments to "try out" a particular skill or sub-task. A *mentor* is generally a more senior employee selected by the employee (or the supervisor) who provides advice or counsel about work issues that may be broader than actual work responsibilities. Their advice and counsel is usually based on their own experience. A *coach* is more likely to be selected by the supervisor and tends to take a more pro-active role in providing the employee with feedback about specific performance issues

Advantages:
- Being able to provide on-the-spot or otherwise timely feedback to specific work questions or problems.
- Establishing a "link" to the organization to help anchor the employee.
- The ability to stick with problematic issues until the employee gets them right.

Disadvantages:
- The time commitment of the mentor/coach that is necessary to provide adequate feedback.
- The possible negative impact on the employee if the mentor/coach is not effective, is not committed, or does not get along with the employee.

Development activities/learning activities – are generally ways of modifying current job responsibilities to help the employee develop new skills for anticipated job responsibilities, job growth, or higher job opportunities.

Examples include:
- Shadowing a more senior employee or an employee with more expertise or experience in a particular skill, process, or program area.
- Task force or special project assignments that will expose the employee to other qualified individuals and provide the opportunity to try out new ideas and skills away from the daily job.
- Detail/rotational assignments that expose the employee to several different functional or program areas outside his or her current job.
- Special individual projects resulting not only in the development of products that will assist the employee with current job responsibilities but, through doing them, give the employee the chance to learn and experiment with new ideas, processes and technology.

The kinds of activities described above are sometimes referred to as "stretch assignments" in that they require the employee to reach beyond current responsibilities and skills to enhance her or his knowledge and experience.

Advantages:
- The opportunity to demonstrate capabilities in ways current job responsibilities might preclude.

Disadvantages:
- The time commitment.
- More importantly, the possibility that the activity is not well thought out or managed, does not result in learning or results worth the investment, or does not relate to the needed skills.

Other activities – encompass the spectrum of other actions available to the employee such as:

- Self-instructional books, audio tapes or computer-assisted learning (such as on-line training offered by ITE and PDS).
- Exposure to new program areas through involvement in professional organizations. (This may be on the employee's own time with the membership fee being at the employee's expense.)
- Participating on various types of committees other than task forces.

Advantages:
- Open-ended and quite flexible, depending on the need and available resources.

Disadvantages:
- There needs to be a clear-cut nexus between the activity and the learning objective, or the experience may not benefit the employee or the organization.

4. Once the learning methods described above have been selected, you need to refine these to specific activities that have measurable results and time frames. Be clear about expectations. For instance, telling a more senior employee to train the employee on the XYZ process is too vague unless you include as the expected result that, once trained,

the employee will be able to complete the process on his or her own in less than two hours with no errors.

5. Involve the employee in the design of the IDP. You may want to do this early in the process, when you have only identified major areas where development should take place and let the employee propose the more specific ways to accomplish this. Or, you may prefer to design the plan and then have the employee review it and provide input.

6. Ensure that you have higher management support for the IDP, including the time commitment and use of resources.

7. You and the employee sign the IDP to document your mutual agreement with it and commitment to completing it. Clarify responsibilities with the employee. If you need to set some of the steps in motion, be sure to follow through; if follow through will be the responsibility of the employee, be sure that is understood.

8. Set up a reporting system so that you know the employee's progress at any given time and can make adjustments to the plan as needed.

Contents and Format

Contents

The IDP should include the following components:
- Personal information: name, class title, agency, period to be covered.
- Short-term developmental goals – usually these will be one or more competencies to be developed, enhanced, or improved within the upcoming evaluation period; indicate the purpose of each goal.
- Results expected and measures.
- Method and/or activity(ies) for developing each competency identified.
- Time frames.

Other components may also be added, such as:
- long-term (1-3 years beyond the upcoming evaluation period) developmental goals and purpose.
- who will provide the training or activities.
- estimated costs and who will pay.
- priority (essential, needed, helpful – although some might reason that anything included on the IDP is essential and therefore a high priority).
- completed date.
- evidence of completion/accomplishment.

Though you want the IDP to be thorough and cover the individual's major development needs, try to keep it brief and to the point so that it does not become unwieldy, overwhelming or difficult to complete. Focus on key areas to be developed.

Format

The following is a sample format. You may modify it as needed.

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Employee _____ Department _____

Position Title _____ Period Covered _____ to _____

Development Goal	Purpose	Method or Activity	Results Expected/Measures	Time Frame

_____   _____
Supervisor's Signature   Date
_____   _____
Employee's Signature   Date

Competencies

Whether the type of development you envision for the employee is to help her or him improve past performance, enhance current capabilities, expose the employee to skills needed in the future, or simply provide enrichment opportunities that make the current job more interesting, fun, or meaningful, what you will probably focus on developing are *competencies*. Competencies are *observable and measurable knowledge, abilities, skills, and behaviors that must be applied to achieve results aligned with the goals of the organization*.

The State of Iowa Competency Library can be found in the Competencies section of the State of Iowa Workforce Planning website. The Library includes the competency, its definition, and the general occupational group to which it is linked. You may select whatever competencies you feel are most important to develop from this list and copy them into your IDP.

Competencies are fairly broad. You may find that, in addition to including the definition in the IDP, you will want to include some sub-tasks, or *behavioral indicators*, to help clarify what exactly you want the employee to develop. This is all stated in the "Development Goal." Once this is laid out, determining the purpose and method/activity for accomplishing it will be easier.

The following sample lays out the information described above:

Example of Results Comments and Rating:

Although Terry completed this strategy as specified in the Performance Plan, it was accomplished without checking with all the appropriate parties to obtain their input and assure the proposed result did not interfere with their program areas.   Meets expectations

Example of Corresponding IDP

Development Goal	Purpose	Method or Activity	Results Expected/Measures	Time Frame
Enhance Interpersonal Skills Develops and maintains effective relationships with others	To ensure that future projects take into consideration the needs and concerns of other units	Planning phase of future projects will include identification of affected internal parties	List completed All affected parties identified per supervisor review	Planning phase of projects undertaken in next evaluation period
Enhance Customer Service skills-Works with individuals who use or receive the services or products that your work unit produces to assess their needs, provide information or assistance, resolve their problems, or satisfy their expectations	Same as above	Progress reports of future projects will be distributed to the affected parties identified above	Progress reports distributed at least three times	Within next evaluation period
		Will take a PDS course in Customer Services	Will be able to list three actions he can take to improve his customer service skills	By March 1, 2004

Monitoring Progress

"Best-laid plans…." You know the rest. But especially in the case of development plans, even the most clear-cut, well-intentioned, well-written plan will go no further if you don't set in place the expectation and wherewithal for how it will get accomplished. And then make sure that is the case. Monitoring progress may involve no more than meeting with the employee to discuss, modify and sign the plan and then empowering the employee to take it from there. But the level of accountability you expect from the employee needs to be communicated clearly.

You may decide to play a more active role in monitoring progress, particularly where performance improvement is concerned, where a major commitment of resources is involved or where the results of the development plan are critical to other endeavors.

Methods of monitoring progress might include:
- Periodic meetings with the employee to check on progress.
- Requiring a note or memo from the employee as each activity is completed or if problems arise.
- Having the employee update the IDP on a periodic basis.
- Checking with the development provider (for instance, if someone is to serve as a mentor for the employee, staying in touch with that individual to make sure the relationship is working).